

The Seattle Ethics & Elections Commission

The SEEC is a seven-member, independent panel of citizen volunteers. The Commission and its staff are responsible for administering the City of Seattle Ethics, Elections, and Whistleblower Protection Codes. Three commissioners are appointed by the Mayor, three by the City Council, and the seventh by the other six. They are confirmed by the City Council and serve overlapping three-year terms.

The Commission is supported by a staff of six employees who provide training, investigate complaints, and issue advisory opinions.

TRAINING AVAILABLE: Departments and employees can receive training on Ethics and Employee Political Activity. Call the SEEC Trainer at 206-684-0595 to schedule training.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

You are invited to attend any Commission meeting. Meetings are usually the first Wednesday of the month in the Seattle Municipal Tower.

Copies of the meeting agenda, including time and location, are in our office and on our Internet web site under Commission Activity. You can also call 206-684-8500 for meeting times and locations.



This brochure highlights SMC 2.04.300, the employee political activity portion of the Seattle Elections Code, as well as provisions of the Seattle Ethics Code, SMC 4.16. The complete laws are on the City Clerk's Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) web site, <http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~public/code1.htm>. Copies are also available in the SEEC office.

City Of Seattle ETHICS AND ELECTIONS COMMISSION

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City of Seattle Employee Political Activity



This pamphlet is intended to help City officers, employees, and members of boards and commissions understand the conduct expected of them under the Seattle Elections Code and the Seattle Ethics Code.

SEATTLE ETHICS AND ELECTIONS COMMISSION

Your advocate for fair, open, and honest government.

Employee Political Activity



City employees have the same political freedoms as all other citizens. But State and City laws may restrict some of those activities in relation to City employment. This brochure summarizes what City employees can and cannot do under the City's Ethics Code (SMC 4.16) and Elections Code (SMC 2.04).

RIGHTS & LIMITATIONS

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Vote.
- Share your views on political subjects and candidates.
- Support campaigns, candidates, and issues.
- Work or volunteer for campaigns.
- Hold a political office.



YOU CANNOT:

- Use your City position to support or oppose a candidate or ballot issue.*
- Do campaign work (free or paid) on City paid time, except vacation or holiday.
- Use or let others use City resources, except generally available public facilities, to help a campaign. City resources include office space, land, vehicles, supplies, telephones, stationery, postage, office equipment, clientele lists, agency publications, etc.
- Put campaign signs, bumper stickers, photos, or fundraiser invitations on City bulletin boards, work area walls, or vehicles.
- Ask for campaign money or signatures on City property not open to the public for such purposes.

**Elected officials:* The City Council may take political actions such as passing motions, resolutions, or ordinances stating positions on ballot issues. Also, a City elected official's title can be put on campaign literature or in the voters' pamphlet as an endorser or a member of an advisory committee.

BALLOT ISSUES

The Commission addresses "ballot issues," not "issues of interest," which are in the discussion stage. Employees who may discuss issues of interest in the course of their jobs are subject to limitations (see left) when the topic becomes a ballot issue.

An issue of interest becomes a ballot issue when:

- 1) Proponents of an initiative submit a proposed form of petition to the City Clerk,
- 2) Proponents of a Charter Amendment begin collecting signatures,
- 3) The City Council votes to place a measure on the ballot, or
- 4) Application for a statewide initiative ballot title is made to the Secretary of State or the Legislature votes to put a question to the public on the ballot.

DEPARTMENT CAUSES:

Even City agencies whose purpose is to promote a cause related to a ballot issue may not use City funds to support the ballot issue explicitly.

MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY:

In addition to ensuring that City time and facilities are not used to support or oppose a candidate or a ballot issue, management may also restrict the use of City time and facilities for an issue of interest.



If you are unsure if an activity is permitted, call the SEEC for guidance. 206-684-8500

HIGHLIGHTS

USE OF PERSONAL TIME AND FACILITIES:

City employees and officials may use their personal time and private facilities to support or oppose a candidate or ballot issue.

USE OF POSITION:

City employees who express an opinion about a ballot issue or candidate may use their titles so long as they make it clear they are expressing their own views and not the views of the City.

PROVIDING UNBIASED INFORMATION ON REQUEST:

An employee or official may use City facilities to provide factual information, on request, about the subject of a ballot proposition, if the information is presented without opinion and it is the employee's duty to provide information.

NORMAL AND REGULAR CONDUCT:

Departments may use City facilities or newsletters or other printed or broadcast resources in ways that have the effect of promoting or opposing a ballot proposition, if the use is part of the department's normal and regular conduct.

EQUAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC FACILITIES:

If City facilities are available to the public for use, candidates and ballot issue committees must have the same access to those facilities as the public does.

ELECTED OFFICIALS' STATEMENTS:

City elected officials may use City facilities to make statements to support or oppose a ballot proposition if they are made in (a) an open press conference; or (b) in response to a specific request.

ELECTED OFFICIALS' MOTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS:

The City Council may adopt resolutions, motions, or ordinances that support or oppose a ballot proposition, and the Mayor can concur in a resolution.

